



## **USDA Labor-Management Relations Update (LMRU)**

(September-October 2003) No. 05-03

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### **Mission**

*The Mission of the USDA Office of Human Resources Management Labor Relations program is to provide expert advice and assistance to all levels of USDA staff and management, especially Labor Relations practitioners, so they are better able to meet their LR obligations while accomplishing the program goals of their Mission Areas and Offices.*

### **USDA Pay Equity Team Activities Update**

As reported in the Summer issue of the LMRU, the Pay Equity Team (Cheryl Dunham-FSIS, Noreen Joice (FSA-KC, Mike Stein FSA-DC, and Pete Rockx-OHRM) developed a five-part action plan to address the issue of how to improve the recruitment and retentions of LR practitioners in USDA. Since then, the team has move forward in implementing portions of the plan. Specifically,

- A preliminary assessment of higher grade LR positions from other (non-USDA) agencies has been completed. Before finalizing, the assessment will be expanded to include more field level LR positions. Comparisons of key factor level descriptions are being done in order to provide managers guidance on how such factors influence grade.
- A survey of current and former USDA LR practitioners will be administered to assess workplace factors that impact attrition, and in the case of former practitioners, what influenced their decision to leave. The survey instruments have been prepared and vetted with the Mission Area LROs for comment. Currently, a census to identify all current and former USDA LR practitioners is been taken in order to prepare for electronic distribution of the survey.
- An assessment of action strategies contained in the USDA Human Capital Plan was done to determine opportunities for Mission Area LROs to interface with agency official responsible for implementing them. Several of the strategies directly pertain to workforce recruitment and retention. This assessment will be provided to LROs in the near future.
- A number of measures to promote information sharing and networking of LR issues and programs between Mission Areas was developed and will be implemented in the next 3-6 months. These include: enhancements to the LMRU (USDA case summaries, Q/As, new LR bios etc.), a Departmental LR office “rotating” award established, and Department wide LR teleconferences.

### **New Faces in New Places within USDA Labor Relations**

**Diane T. McFadgen**, the new Labor Relations Officer at the Natural Resources and Conservation Service, came to USDA from the Department of Commerce.

**John Hippe**, ER/LR Specialist, joined the Farm Service Agency, Kansas City staff from the Veteran's Administration.

**Eddie Asadorian**, LR Specialist, selected to join the Rural Development, St Louis staff from USDA-FSA, Kansas City.

### **USDA Labor Relations Strategy Team Meets**

Progress continues to be made in the development of a recommended labor relations strategy for the Department. The strategy is intended to articulate how the labor relations aspects of significant cross cutting issues like competitive sourcing will be addressed.

The team, chaired by Ruthie Jackson, USDA Chief Human Capital Officer, consists of John Williams (FSA), Sherie Hinton Henry (RD), Al Berry (OGC), Larry Quinn (OC) and Pete Rockx (OHRM). Meetings are being facilitated by Kurt Saunders, a Commissioner from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service. Creation of a Departmental LR strategy is an action strategy contained in the USDA Human Capital Plan. The draft strategy will be presented to the Assistant Secretary for Administration and Deputy Secretary by the end of 2003.

### **Cross Cutting USDA Labor Relations Issues – Update**

In an effort to provide readers an update on the previously identified significant issues facing the USDA LR community in 2003, the following table offers a summary of the most recent developments. Highlighted portions of the “Status” blocks in the table contain updated information since the previous LMRU.

<b>Project/Issue</b>	<b>Status</b>
<i>South Building Renovations</i> – strengthen USDA-Mission Area coordination to identify and resolve LR issues timely	USDA Office of Operations has provided update on Phase 3 of the renovation – affected Mission Areas notified – no significant LR issues reported
<i>Establishing a USDA LR strategy/protocol</i> – to ensure Departmental consistency in dealing with significant USDA-wide LR issues	❑ USDA team formed first meeting held (See article above)
<i>USDA LR services contract</i> – to provide Mission Areas with a ready source of LR contract support	❑ BPAs were established, but not used in FY '03. Decision whether to renew BPAs is pending
<i>Competitive Sourcing (CS)</i> – meeting LR obligations of CS consistently within USDA	❑ Program Manager for LR is on the OCFO competitive sourcing team. ❑ Procurement Executive Council to offer free CS Conference on Oct 16, 2003 at US Dept. of Interior Auditorium. See <a href="http://www.fac.gov/">http://www.fac.gov/</a> .
<i>Pay equity for journey-level LR practitioners</i> – how to improve recruitment	❑ Task force formed and action plan being implemented (see article above).

and retention of LR practitioners in USDA, including apparent pay disparity between LR positions in USDA and other agencies.	
<i>OCIO Reorganization and the Field Service Agencies</i> (FSA, NRCS, and RD) – how to deal with bargaining and potential representation issues associated with the planned reorganization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Known as Service Center Agencies (SCA) IT Convergence. LR IT Team formed. Labor Relations Strategy and action plans developed to address key issues.</li> <li>❑ Implementation in progress. (See article below)</li> </ul>
<i>USDA Human Capital Plan implementation</i> – cooperatively resolving LR action strategies contained in the Plan (Note: The USDA Human Capital Plan contains the Department’s Human Capital goals for the next 5 years, <a href="http://www.usda.gov/da/employ/usda-human-capital-plan.htm">http://www.usda.gov/da/employ/usda-human-capital-plan.htm</a> ).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ HC and AP are posted on the USDA OHRM website at <a href="http://www.usda.gov/da/employ.html">http://www.usda.gov/da/employ.html</a></li> <li>❑ Team developing automated labor relations tracking and reporting system (see article below).</li> </ul>

### **Service Center Agency (SCA) IT Convergence – The Labor Relations Piece**

In the previous LMRU, “SCA IT Convergence” was explained as well as why this reorganization and transfer of function is important from a labor relations perspective. Since then, a number of activities have taken place as OCIO, FSA, RD and NRCS go about the business of working toward implementing the convergence. From a labor relations perspective, activities that have taken place include:

- ❑ A Focus Group meeting was held between OCIO, OHRM and Union officials from several of the key bargaining units with affected employees to share information, and listen to their issues and recommendations. A summary of the meeting is posted to the OCIO convergence website at <http://www.itconv.usda.gov/itconv/>.
- ❑ Establishing a recurring LR teleconferences between OCIO and Union officials from SCA bargaining units, to share information and issues related to the convergence. These teleconferences were established as part of the IT Working Group (ITWG) communication process. Copies of call summaries are posted to the OCIO convergence web site.
- ❑ The LR IT Team (labor relations representatives from the SCA, OHRM and the OCIO Project Manager) continues to meet regularly, to discuss and coordinate LR issues associated with the convergence, including obtaining advice from the FLRA on representation matters.

### **USDA Labor Relations Officer Meeting Set – October 21, 2003**

If you want to talk about the USDA brand of Labor Relations, plan on coming to the LRO meeting on October 21 at in Room 10A (basement) of the Whitten Building.

## **Progress on the Labor and Employee Relations Automated Tracking and Reporting System (LERACTRS)**

Representatives from the Mission Areas and OHRM (Tom Valenti – MRP, Bernie Freeman-FS, Richard Reyes-FSIS, Jeff Shen – OHRM, Keith Prue- OHRM and Pete Rockx-OHRM) continue to make progress in their efforts to establish a Department wide computer data base for labor and employee relations cases. The system will be MS Access-based, drawing from the FSIS system currently in use. Objectives for data tracking needs have been established for the LR component of the system, and several functionality determinations made (e.g. data to be stratified down to three levels within an organization). In addition, the team is working with OCIO – NITC to determine the level of support and costs associated with supporting the system. The FSIS system will be demonstrated at the next LRO meeting. An interesting side story to this project, is that after viewing the FSIS system, MRP has initiated steps to make minor modifications and implement it while the Department wide effort is still underway. Apparently, they liked what they saw.

## **Register Now for USDA Labor-Management Relations Training**

The Office of Human Resources Management, in cooperation with senior labor relations staff from several Mission Areas, will be conducting another a five-day course: *Labor-Management Relations for Human Resources Practitioners*, November 17-21, 2003 in Washington DC. Registration is open through October 10, 2003, and can be done on line at <http://www.usda.gov/da/employ/training-development-resources.htm>. Feedback from attendees who completed previous classes has been very favorable. The course was developed as a means to provide basic labor relations competencies to USDA employees with significant labor relations responsibilities.

## **ILRF Meeting – October 16**

After being blown away by Isabel in September, the Interagency Labor Relation Forum (ILRF) will try again on October 16 at 1:30pm in the South Agriculture cafeteria meeting room. The presenter will Kurt Saunders, a Commissioner with the FMCS, who will talk about the various programs and ways the FMCS can assist agencies in meeting their LMR obligations and needs. They do much more than just mediating negotiations. ILRF meetings are open to any Federal LR practitioner.

<p>The USDA LMRU is issued periodically by the USDA Office of Human Resources Management's (OHRM) Program, Policy and Partnership Division as a method and means to highlight significant events occurring in the federal Labor Relations profession within the Department. It will also contain what we believe to be useful LMR information received by the USDA from other federal agencies and outside sources that may not be readily available to the Mission Area Labor Relations community. Readers are encouraged to submit questions, suggested topics and LMR news to improve the utility of the LMRU. Queries and comments should be sent to <a href="mailto:peter.rockx@usda.gov">peter.rockx@usda.gov</a>.</p>
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